

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 19743

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PARA 7)

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, FR
SUBJ: POSSIBLE FRENCH PURCHASE OF BOEING 707 FUEL TANKERS BY
FRENCH

REF: STATE 136096

1. SUMMARY: EMBASSY BELIEVES POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES OF SELLING
FIVE BOEING 707 320JS TO FRANCE (REFTEL) FAR OUTWEIGH
POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS. WE RECOMMEND APPROVAL OF EXPORT AUTHORITY
END SUMMARY.

2. AT TIME WHEN WE ARE SEEKING FORMS OF CLOSER MILITARY COOP-
ERATION WITH FRANCE, APPROVAL OF EXPORT AUTHORITY FOR BOEING
AIRCRAFT WOULD BE TANGIBLE EVIDENCE THAT WE ARE PREPARED TO
RESPOND IN FORTHCOMING MANNER TO GOF REQUEST IN DEFENSE FIELD.

3. MOREOVER, SHOULD FRENCH DECIDE TO PURCHASE THESE AIRCRAFT,
IT WOULD HAVE FAVORABLE IMPACT ON US BALANCE OF PAYMENTS
SITUATION. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE OF ACTUAL COST IN-
VOLVED, WE SUSPECT IT COULD TOTAL AS MUCH AS \$50 MILLION.

4. FINALLY, AS WE SEEK WAYS TO DEMONSTRATE THAT EUROPEANS
ARE DOING MORE IN THEIR OWN DEFENSE. FRENCH PURCHASE OF BOEING
AIRCRAFT COULD BE SEEN AS EVIDENCE, ALBEIT NATIONAL RATHER
THAN THROUGH MULTILATERAL NATO FORUM, THAT FRENCH ARE CONTRI-
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BUTING TO DEFENSE BURDEN SHARING EFFORT OF WESTERN ALLIES.

5. IN ADDITION TO THESE POSITIVE REASONS FOR APPROVING EXPORT AUTHORITY, WE BELIEVE THAT USG DECISION TO REFUSE AUTHORITY COULD HAVE NEGATIVE IMPACT ON ATMOSPHERE OF US-GOF RELATIONS. UNDOUBTEDLY, SUCH US DECISION WOULD BE INTERPRETED HERE AS AN ATTEMPT TO IMPOSE ON FRANCE US VIEWS OF WHAT PROPER FRENCH FORCE POSTURE SHOULD BE. THIS COULD, OF COURSE, FEED THE OLD GAULLIST ARGUMENTS OF "US HEGEMONY".

6. WE WOULD NOT EXPECT BOEING DEAL TO CAUSE CONCERN TO NATO ALLIES.

7. POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS INCLUDE FOLLOWING POINTS:

A. WHILE FRENCH MAINTAIN TANKERS WILL BE USED FOR FIGHTER AIRCRAFT PERFORMING TACTICAL RATHER THAN STRATEGIC, WE CANNOT BE SURE THAT THEY WOULD NOT EVENTUALLY BE USED TO SUPPORT MIRAGE IV STRATEGIC SYSTEMS, OR MIRAGE III AND JAGUAR TACTICAL AIRCRAFT WHICH ARE IN THE PROCESS OF RECEIVING AN-52 TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS. WHETHER MIRAGE III AND THE JAGUAR AIRCRAFT EQUIPPED WITH NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND CAPABLE OF IN-FLIGHT REFUELING REMAIN "TACTICAL," OR TAKE ON A "STRATEGIC" ROLE IN A COMPLEX QUESTION WHICH, NEVERTHELESS, SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN REACHING DECISION ON BOEING DEAL.

B. ALTHOUGH WE ARE IN NO POSITION TO WEIGH LIKELY RE-ACTION OF NON-NATO THIRD COUNTRIES TO SUCH SALE, COUNTRIES HAVING A PARTICULAR SENSITIVITY TO FRENCH NUCLEAR PROGRAM (E.G., AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, SOVIET UNION) MIGHT BE TROUBLED BY BOEING DEAL.

IM REGARDING POSSIBILITY THAT FRENCH AIR FORCE MIGHT NEGOTIATE WITH BOEING FOR CONVERSION OF 6-7 AIR FRANCE 707 (PARIS 24631), WE UNDERSTAND FROM FRENCH AIR FORCE (FAF) SOURCE THAT CONVERSION OF AIR FRANCE 707'S IS NOT UNDER CONSIDERATION AT THIS TIME. HOWEVER, SOURCE TOLD US THAT FAF IS IN TOUCH WITH HAYS CORPORATION (NFI) THROUGH THEIR DEFENSE ATTACHE IN WASHINGTON. HAYES HAS BEEN ASKED TO PROVIDE COST ESTIMATE TO CONVERT USED 707'S INTO TANKERS. ACCORDING TO FAF, HAYES IS CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN MAINTAINING USAF KC-135 FLEET. FAF ANTICIPATES HAYES COST ESTIMATE BASED ON APPROXIMATE CAPACITY AND REQUIREMENTS FURNISHED BY THE FAF. CONFIDENTIAL

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THEY WOULD HOPE TO WORK OUT A FORMULA WHERE HAYES AND SNIAS (SOCIETE NATIONALE DES INDUSTRIES AEROSPATIALES) WOULD CO-OPERATE TO REDUCE TOTAL COST. ACCORDING TO SOURCE, FAF WILL NOT CONSIDER PURCHASING HAYES MODIFIED AIRCRAFT IF TOTAL COST EXCEEDS ONE HALF THE COST OF NEW AIRCRAFT. PRESUMABLE, HAYES WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR FINDING APPROPRIATE AIRCRAFT.

9. RECOMMENDATION: THEY EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT POTENTIAL

ADVANTAGES OUTLINED ABOVE OUTWEIGH SPECULATIVE DISADVANTAGES
IN PARA 7 ABOVE. WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND THAT DEPARTMENT
APPROVE BOEING REQUEST FOR EXPORT AUTHORITY SHOULD BOEING
DECIDE TO PURSUE IDEA. GDS
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